

GREELEY COUNTY - ANGELS NEXT DOOR

Two Wolbach women turn dream into heavenly reality.

Sherry Berney and Marjorie Stoffel always had a dream.

They talked about it on the many junk jaunts and bargain hunting trips they made together for 20-plus years, always searching for antiques or unusual items.

"We'd just go junkin' for a whole day or into Iowa for three days, then we'd have all this stuff," Sherry laughed. "We'd always say it would be nice to have a shop to put it all in. That went on for years and years because Marge moved in between. Then it just never got to be. We just got busy with life in general."

The two women aren't just good friends. They have also been sisters-in-law for 37 years. Both women live in Wolbach; however, Marjorie and her husband, Joe, moved to Colorado for a number of years while Sherry and husband Dick remained in Wolbach. When Marjorie's husband retired several years ago, they moved back to the small Nebraska town.

That's when Sherry reignited their passion to open a shop to sell antiques, gifts and knick-knacks, as well as a lunch and coffee house. Thoughts of opening this type of business in a town that had only a population of around 300 seemed daring, but the women realized a dream not worth acting upon wasn't worth dreaming.

"Sherry said we've talking about it for enough years. We're doing it," Marjorie said of her sister-in-law's tenacity. "I told her, too, if it doesn't work there is no place for people to stay overnight and we can turn the shop it into a place to stay."

Sherry heard of several older homes for sale. "I thought to myself, if I don't go look at them I'll chicken out, I'll back out again," she said.

A one-story cozy house towards the east end of main street seemed to suit their needs. When Sherry announced to her business partner in November of 2004 that she'd bought the house, the plan was put into motion.

Most of the walls in the house had been covered with dark paneling. It took several coats of Kilz and paint before the fresh coats of bright yellow, sage and chartreuse in the eating area and kitchen began to emerge. New woodwork also needed to be added. Not only were the women's skills put to work, but their husband's carpentry talents as well.

"We got sick and tired of painting the walls, and there was hardly any woodwork," Sherry recalled. "(Marjorie's) husband made almost all the woodwork because the (previous owner) had taken it off and taken the paneling and butted it up against the window. It was ugly."

The woodwork was made from old lumber the women had stored in their garage from a house that had been torn down, and was made to look like original woodwork in a house of that era.

"I think sometimes the hardest thing was we were always in a mess," Marjorie added. "We had to rewire and replumb. There were tools everywhere and you couldn't keep up with it." They knew in buying the house they would have to rewire, but unexpected expenses such as plumbing weren't in the plan, neither were digging out the sewer twice and buying a baseboard heater.

The bathroom was in the worst condition. Wainscoting was placed around the bottom of the walls and on the ceiling, and after tearing out several layers of linoleum they discovered the original rose-flowered linoleum. After applying a layer of polyurethane, keeping the original flooring added to the old-fashioned character of the burgundy bathroom.

One of the dining areas, however, provides a main attraction.

After removing layers of shag carpeting, tar paper and old linoleum to get to the original wood floor, “one thing led to another” and a unique floor plan evolved. Sherry painted the wooden floor in big squares of soft yellows, greens and browns, then placed a smaller square pattern from wallpaper in some of the painted squares.

“You should have seen the guy’s face at Menards when I asked him what could I get to put over the top of something to make it seal on the floor,” Sherry recalled with humor. “He asked what I was putting down and when I said wallpaper, he asked, ‘Why would you put wallpaper on the floor?’ I asked him why would you not put wallpaper down!”

After several coats of polyurethane, the floor was finally complete.

When the house was purchased the women were told there was only a crawl space underneath the building. As the house was being rewired their husbands discovered a full basement, so an attractive opening to the basement was fashioned out of old doors so the space could be utilized.

Old tables purchased from the women’s earlier shopping excursions were turned into works of art as well. They covered the plain brown tops with pictures from calendar collections and then sealed the table tops with a clear finish.

Items they had collected through the years, such as antique furniture, lamps, candles, dishes and knick-knacks were used for decor and set up for sale. The shop also provided Marjorie the opportunity to display her partial collection of women’s hats, of which she has 120.

After a year’s worth of remodeling, there was still work to be done. However, Sherry decided Nebraska’s fall Junk Jaunt would be a good time to open.

“We had been working and working on the house and Sherry said, ‘We’re opening for the Junk Jaunt whether we’re ready or not.’ You can put things off and say this or that still have to be done, but we didn’t. We just did it,” Marjorie said.

Although the women say “it’s been a challenge,” their hard work was rewarded with positive comments. “When the ladies first walked in, they couldn’t believe something like this was in this little town.”

That was in September of 2006, and “Angels Next Door” – or “the angel house” as folks around Wolbach have dubbed it – has been open ever since. The business name came about because of its location. “We’re next to the church and parsonage,” Sherry explained, “and because we certainly aren’t angels – they’re next door – we named it Angels Next Door.”

Since opening, the women have had to tear out a partition to allow for more eating space for patrons and parties. From the Sunshine Sweet Rolls to the chicken casseroles “everything is homemade, just like it’s from your kitchen,” Sherry said. “We like to find new and interesting recipes,” like their Cappuccino bars or tomato spice cake.

“The ladies love to come and see what’s new,” Marjorie said of the ever-changing decor and menu. “Sherry is always rearranging and changing things. Some of the women come and stay half the afternoon to play cards or just visit. One day I had to leave early so I just had the club meeting ladies lock up” – another reason the relaxed small town atmosphere is appreciated.

Marjorie also teaches craft classes and the ladies mail an Angels Next Door newsletter every three months to customers.

The list of expansion ideas is still in progress. "Now our project is to find an old wire corncrib to put in the back yard for a party place," Sherry said. "We saw the idea in a magazine."

A pumpkin patch and pumpkin carving for the kids are also in the planning stages.

Finding the time to put their ideas to work can prove challenging. Sherry is also a full-time nurse in Grand Island. "Somedays it's not very easy working both, but I can't stand to be idle."

Idle is hardly a word that can be heard at Angels Next Door, although in a town the size of Wolbach, there were skeptics who thought it wouldn't survive.

But for these two entrepreneurs, it was just a matter of Midwest ingenuity.

And daring to dream.

"Just do what you feel like doing. Follow your dream," they suggest. "That's what we did."

For more information, contact Angels Next Door at 308.246.5369. After hours call 308.246-5583 or 308.379.1826.